

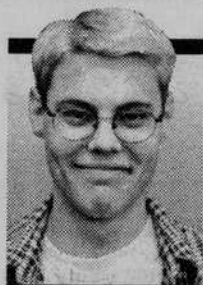
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Perspectives

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Writing 122: *a raw deal*

Requisite writing classes stifle student freedom for educational exploration, while committing students to a false sense of community



Bret Jacobson

Panicking like an animal caught in a hunter's steel trap with the associated impulse to chew off my own limbs on the path to liberation, I look around and realize why I put off taking Writing 122 for so long: the forced, artificial community GTFs love to push. The writing classes push a counterfeit sense of community and should not be required.

Community is a hackneyed buzzword that has become popular again of late. Besides Hillary Clinton's insightful prescription on how to raise children, the recent Supreme Court case on student fees revolved around the idea that universities play the role of community square so that all voices can be heard on public matters. People seek new ways to connect with others like themselves on Internet chat rooms and America Online's Instant Messenger. These types of interpersonal associations are important and bring people together in new and dynamic ways.

But there's a clear and important distinction between those forms of gathering and the requisite writing classes. The classes, which attempt to hone composition and analytical skills, derive the basis for written assignments through oral classroom discourse among students of greatly varying intellect, interest level, knowledge base and reasoning skills.

This is in contrast to more chooser-friendly associations. The type of public discourse endorsed by the Supreme Court allows the use of student fees to fund student groups, allowing participants to choose to be active where their interests lie. When one is drawn to a particular cause or issue, they are more likely to be informed and passionate and ready to speak in the group.

Such is not the case with the writing classes at the University. The sad attempt at a community setting damns the class quality to mediocrity from the start. Given the general sense of politeness and the politically correct notion that we're all equal — an idea proven false every time one

steps into the classroom — the conversations usually settle to the level of the least expressive minds and most robust voices.

The variability in argumentative ability also leads to an all around insufficient quality of class. The variable level of student skill makes sure that the writing classes don't adequately suit the learning needs of the majority of students. Besides this fact, GTFs contrast widely in their own abilities to relay their inconsistent ideas on writing. These variances offer proof against the idea of a general skill base expected of graduates.

The coerced community also goes against the sentiment involved in the advent of on-line degrees to be offered at this institution. The on-line education allows students to formulate their own ideas at their own pace and moments of brilliance as opposed to the on-site writing classes that force those of disparate ability and interest into the same room.

Some may argue that all other classes require similar gatherings of dissimilar people. That is true inasmuch as no group of people are completely alike. Within the bounds of major requirements, almost every other class is chosen by students to advance their degree progress or expand their perspective in a way they desire. This freedom ensures, to a higher degree, their participation and input.

The University can maintain the high level of public discourse throughout campus by relying on student interest groups and class choices that students are able to make for themselves. Student activism and self-motivated choices offer better forums for important discussions than demanding the writing composition classes currently required.

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